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ORGANIZED VIOLENCE IN URBAN AREAS: A Selected Bibliography

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by

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Society in an organic sense mirrors the anabolism-catabolism cycle of living creatures: a building-up process followed by a transitional period concluded by a tearing-down process. In living beings this cycle is continuous, and whether anabolism exceeds catabolism or vice versa is an indicator of the being's general state of health and to some extent its age.

Human societies generally have a cyclic character of greater duration than any one anabolic/catabolic subcycle. From a stage of nomadic hunting, farming and crude manufacturing are developed. To facilitate exchange of goods and services, and to fulfill human needs for companionship and spiritual development, communities are formed. As more resources are discovered and manipulated, communities become villages, town, cities, and metropolitan agglomerations. As the society becomes too remote to relate to the individual, the individual and groups of like-minded people resort to violence to "put their point across." Cities are torn by internal and external (invasionary) acts of force and violence,

which eventually leads to a general dysfunction of the societal structure. (One must forgive the author poetic license in presenting a simplistic view of such a complex process in such a short description.)

Occurrence of violent acts seems to be related directly to both density and diversity of population, although much research remains to be done in this area. Since the urban condition represents a high density and a high degree of diversity of population (herein diversity means the mix of racial types, ethnic types, and of those holding different political, social, economic, religious, and philosophical viewpoints), it would seem natural to expect in the urban area increased levels of both individual and organized violence.

A brief listing of the participants in acts of organized violence include student demonstrators, anti-war groups, political revolutionaries, racists of all kinds, labor organizations, various factions of organized crime, and representatives of federal, state and local governments.

Why violence occurs is a matter not so easily enumerated. However, cities are places where dissidents (for lack of a better word) can seek out others of the same beliefs, and generate action where before there was only talk. For many, frustration is a major factor; frustration at personal inadequacies, at authority for failure to preserve the status quo (or failure to change), at a society that has grown

probably too complex and too vast for any one individual to comprehend or to easily manipulate to satisfy personal needs. Then, too, the proximity of dissimilar beliefs and cultures found in urban areas tends to generate friction where before there was none.

Generally, organized violence in urban areas can and does occur for religious/philosophical reasons (believer versus nonbeliever); economic reasons (haves versus have-nots, want-mores versus everyone else); political radicalism (anti-war riots, Communist insurgencies, Loyalist counter-insurgencies); sociological differences (race, ethnic, and cultural differences); and deliberate criminal acts (protection rackets, gangland warfare). All of these competing factions find in the city an "urban jungle" which can be readily adapted to the patterns of organized violence.

Unfortunately, few writers on the subject have been able to propose remedies for such acts, and those that have been proposed - such as Banfield's "preventative detention" (jailing someone "likely" to commit a crime) - appear to be legally unacceptable. Apparently, as long as the human race develops societies where individuals have some measure of freedom without a corresponding sense of responsibility, then those societies' cities are destined upon occasion to become battlefields.

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